

# Love Center Church History (Full Version)

## **THE BEGINNING (CIRCA 1971 - 1972).**

While performing in Europe with *The Edwin Hawkins Singers*, God planted the seed for this ministry in the heart of a maturing young man named Walter Hawkins. After returning to the states, Walter organized lively biblical discussions in the home of his mother, Mamie Vivian Hawkins. These discussions grew into informal group meetings that evolved quickly into regular, organized bible studies. These bible studies were radical at the time because they delved into topics unpopular with mainstream Christianity. It became quite obvious that the hand of God was on Walter's life. Naturally, he accepted God's call to pastor, attended seminary, received his ministerial license, and was ordained by his pastor, Bishop E. E. Cleveland of the Ephesians Church of God in Christ in Berkeley, California. Shortly thereafter in October of 1972, the Love Center Church was birthed in the flatlands of East Oakland.

## **LOVE CENTER'S FIRST FEW ADDRESSES: 8411 AND 8901 MACARTHUR BLVD.**

A small, simple storefront at 8411 MacArthur Blvd. in Oakland near Castlemont High School was the first home of the Love Center Church. In short time the building became too small and the church acquired its first property, another storefront, at 8901 MacArthur Blvd. Over the next 10 years, the Love Center Church membership overflowed the small, one-room building. People gathered to hear Pastor Hawkins' profound, yet practical message on "*The Fisherman*." This foundational message remains at the core of this ministry. In part, it simply states that we as Christians are fishers of men. It is our responsibility to catch any and everyone in God's safety net by sharing the good news of the gospel with whomever will listen. We understand that we cannot determine who should hear the gospel and that we are commissioned to share without bias. In turn, God in His infinite grace and abundant mercy will transform by His sanctifying Holy Spirit and through the preached Word. Thus, all are welcome regardless of race, socioeconomic standing, circumstances, or religious belief.

The unconventional approach of Hawkins generated growth at 8901 MacArthur and the first church department emerged – the Love Center Choir under the direction of Pastor Hawkins. God blessed Love Center Church with gifted singers, songwriters and musicians. It was from this humble beginning that two best-selling, world renowned gospel albums were released, Love Alive and Love Alive II. In addition to the powerful voices of the Love Center Choir, the albums featured the phenomenal voices of Pastor Hawkins, his then wife Tramaine Hawkins, sisters Carol, Feddie, and Lynette Hawkins, brothers Edwin and Daniel Hawkins on piano and organ and the incomparable Rev. Daryl Coley.

## **LOVE CENTER MOVES INTO CINE 7: 3814 MACARTHUR BLVD.**

After two years Love Center sold its building and bought the old, dilapidated and uninhabitable Cine 7 movie theater located at 3814 MacArthur Blvd. Pastor Hawkins and the Love Center membership worked diligently to refurbish the decaying structure and within a few months the newly renovated building opened with rave reviews from the local community. The once boarded-up foyer was adorned with exquisitely restored chandeliers. The interior of the building was tastefully painted in salmon and peach with turquoise and gold trim, and lit by brass and glass sconces mounted throughout the auditorium. A large semi-circular stage where Pastor Hawkins boldly proclaimed the Word of God now stood where the theater's movie screen once was. This stage was the set for the Love Alive III recording. God once again blessed this project, which remained in the number one spot on the Billboard Gospel Chart for 34 weeks. In addition, one more album series, Love Alive IV, was recorded at this location in 1989.

## **LOVE CENTER GROWS INTO IT'S NEXT LOCATION: 6325 CAMDEN STREET**

Within three years the membership of Love Center doubled from 300 to 600, then to 900 members. Once again, the church was overflowing in capacity and Pastor Hawkins knew it was time to look for a larger property. He found Concordia High School on Camden Avenue in Oakland, which had been vacant for 9 months. He knew instinctively that this would be Love Center's next home and therefore a beautifully renovated building at 3814 MacArthur was traded for a fifteen classroom - six office smaller auditorium within the Concordia City Park setting. To accommodate the 900 members, the church instituted two Sunday services, 8am and 11am. Also, a building fund drive was launched to add a 1200 seat sanctuary and kitchen.

As God continued to elevate Pastor Hawkins in his hometown, Oakland mayor Elihu Harris requested that Pastor Hawkins write an anthem for the city. The anthem, titled *Oakland Hometown*, was enthusiastically received during a unity rally that was held after the Los Angeles riots.

On October 18, 1992 Love Center Church and the Bay Area witnessed the elevation of Pastor Hawkins to the office of bishopric by Bishop George D. McKinney and Bishop Wilbert L. Baltimore. In this same year the Love Fellowship component of the Edwin Hawkins Music & Arts Seminar was sanctioned. Nine affiliated churches from across the United States approached Bishop Hawkins for spiritual covering. To date, there are 25 Love Fellowship pastors nationwide and one in Cape Town, South Africa. It should also be noted that additional pastors were waiting for affiliation in Johannesburg, Durban, Nairobi, Kenya, and Nigeria. Bishop Hawkins' mission of this fellowship was to inspire, instruct, strengthen, encourage and to impact pastors to fulfill their God-given destinies, even if accomplished in a non-traditional, non-conventional way.

The music ministry of the Love Center Church continued to flourish and in October 1997 Bishop Hawkins and the choir recorded Love Alive V at the Paramount Theater in Oakland. The local community shall not soon forget the mighty outpouring of the power and presence of God with over sixty people receiving Jesus Christ that evening.

### **LOVE CENTER'S 'WILDERNESS PERIOD' SCOTTISH RITE HALL & HAVENSCOURT COMMUNITY CHURCH.**

Once again the church was overflowing and it was time to look for a new home. In 1998, the Camden Street property was sold and for the first time Love Center did not have a permanent home. The church spent six months in what we affectionately call our "wilderness period." Sunday services were held at the Scottish Rite Hall and weekly bible study and prayer services at the Havenscourt Community Church where Dr. Claude Wilson was pastor. It was a humbling time for us but our pastor never lost faith. He kept on preaching the unadulterated Word of God.

### **LOVE CENTER ARRIVES AT 10440 INTERNATIONAL BLVD.**

In February 1999 God brought our pastor full circle by providing an old car dealership at 10400 - 10440 East 14th Street (*the street name has since changed to International Blvd.*). The building stands on the corner of 104th Street, a few blocks from where Bishop Hawkins and his siblings were raised. As an honorary gesture, a side street of the church was re-named *Walter Hawkins Way* by the city of Oakland.



Love Center Church thrived tremendously at the new location. It was here in 2005 that Bishop Walter Hawkins recorded his sophomore solo project, *Song In My Heart* with standing room only. Then in 2009 at the height of ministry Pastor Hawkins announced to the congregation that he had developed pancreatic cancer. Sadly, on July 11, 2010 our beloved Bishop Walter Hawkins transitioned after a lengthy battle with the disease. Needless to say, this was a very traumatic blow to the Love Center family, as we lost our legendary leader and founder at the pinnacle of the church's existence. Pastor Hawkins had many dreams for the ministry, including opening a satellite location in Manteca, California, a television ministry, as well as recording the next Love Alive series.

Though devastated, Love Center Church acquiesced to God's perfect will and rested in the belief that God knows best. In January of 2011 the pastoral baton was handed off to Pastor Hawkins' son, Walter "Jamie" Hawkins Jr., who was ordained in a full ceremony at the church. Soon after, Pastor Jamie Hawkins founded his own ministry and Rev. Sandy Coleman was appointed as Interim Senior Pastor.

In January of 2016, Pastor Elect Rev. Kenneth Smith was installed as pastor of Love Center Ministries. The installation ceremony was officiated by Overseer Julia Whitehurst-Wade. Pastor Smith served the ministry until May 14, 2019.

Currently, Love Center is excited about the future and eager to go wherever the Lord is leading. The church continues to play a dynamic role in meeting the needs of the community and is a mecca for gospel music lovers visiting the Oakland area. The heart of our founder was to change lives through love and hope. We are keeping LOVE ALIVE.

May the great and living vision of this ministry continue to be accomplished in all the world until the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.